



A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
COVERING ALL ASPECTS OF
THE VIDEO GAMING HOBBY
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ON SCREEN



ALL GAME TITLES, CHARACTERS,
AND DISTINCTIVE LIKENESSES
THEREOF ARE TRADEMARKS OF
THEIR RESPECTIVE COMPANIES.

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WELCOME!

...to the first of what we hope will be a regular thing. "On Screen" is a publication devoted to every aspect of the hobby of video games, from collectability, rarity, and modern updates of classic titles.

Of course, a game doesn't have to be old to be collectable, so we're including plenty of reviews of the newest titles available.

And what video game collector doesn't play his or her games? We'll compare different versions of games as well as point out some of those little known gems that you might have overlooked.

With enough interest, we hope to keep this up for a long time. So please, let us know what you think, and drop us a line anytime!

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE

Many of the classic arcade games we review are being played on MacMAME (the Macintosh Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator), a wonderful shareware program by Brad Oliver that allows us to play virtually exact replicas of several games without leaving the workstation. To get your copy of MacMAME, visit <http://www.primenet.com/~bradman/mame>.

A PC version of MAME is also available, and you can find it by following the links on Brad's page, or at <http://valhalla.ph.tn.tudelft.nl/emul8>.

Xot's

CLASSIC

Perspectives on Retrogaming



Rarity: *Uncommon to Rare*

Format(s): *Arcade Upright, MacMAME emulation*

Release Date: *1983*

To christen my column, I'd like to start off with a major review of Jr. Pac-Man. Why? Well, quite frankly, because I own it. It's the first full-sized arcade game to be added to my collection. I purchased it in April of 1996, because I've only seen the game twice in my entire life, and I figured it was a good symbol of my video game collecting philosophy: Respect the old and throw in a healthy mix of the new. It's Pac-Man, but with a slightly modern twist.

Players of Pac-Man and Ms. Pac-Man will have no trouble jumping right into this one. But there are some major differences that easily make Jr. Pac-Man the most challenging in the series.

The first thing you'll notice is the larger maze. Yep, the screen scrolls; the total area of the maze is roughly double the size of the screen, and as you cross the center of the screen the maze scrolls to follow you. This only takes a little while to get used to, but the big drawback is that you need to remember where you left that last little clump of dots. Many a rookie is killed when he thinks he's eating his last four dots only to find the monsters are still moving. You'll also be pleased to know there are no side exits.

Following the pattern of Pac-Man and Ms. Pac-Man, there are even more mazes to contend with. While Ms. Pac-Man had four mazes and they changed after a few repetitions, Jr. Pac-Man's maze

CORNER



Xot's Jr. Pac-Man machine, standing proudly in a corner of his apartment.

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Buster Bros. Collection may not be worth the wait

System: Sony Playstation
Publisher: Capcom
Genre: Puzzle

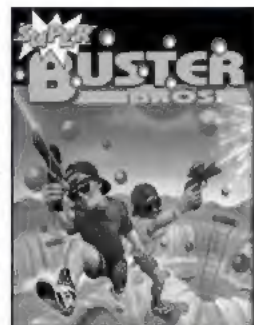
The Buster Bros. Collection CD is a long time in coming (its planned release was announced well before the original Street Fighter Alpha) and it's not readily apparent why. The CD is a compilation of three older titles, whose conversion couldn't have been that difficult, and a fairly awkward interface to switch between the three. If you're a fan of games like Baku Baku and Bust-A-Move, then you'll probably want to pick this up. Otherwise, you'd probably be wiser to

move on.

The most well known in the series is Super Buster Bros., the only game of the three with large-scale nationwide distribution. The basic idea of all three games is identical: Bubbles fall from the sky, and you need to pop them. Larger bubbles bounce higher and break into smaller bubbles when hit, and the smallest size disappears when hit. Kind of a cross between Asteroids and Bubble Bobble.

In all three games, there is a 'tour mode' in which you face a different set of obstacles and configuration of bubbles until you reach the final stage. In Super Buster Bros. and

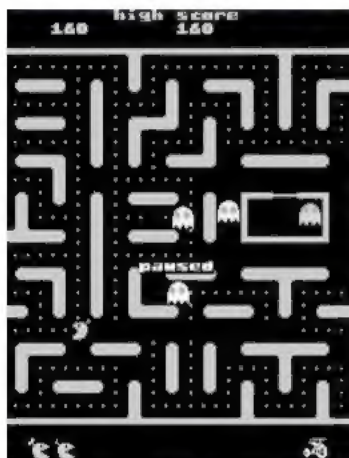
Buster Buddies, there is also a 'Panic Mode' in which bubbles continuously rain down until you run out of lives. Super's Panic Mode is non-stop, while Buddies' gives you a breather after every 10 levels. In both cases, your level increases after



Super Buster Bros. is the most well-known game of the three.

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Jr. Pac-Man toughest in the series



Screen shot of Jr. Pac-Man, emulated via MacMAME

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changes after every board, for a total of seven new mazes. Once that screen's done, forget it; you won't see it again. (The exception is upon completion of the seventh board, when you then rotate from board 6 to board 5, and then back to 7 again.)

The big challenge, though, is the prizes, sometimes called Toy Candies. Like the fruit in Ms. Pac-Man, they bounce around the maze, looking like an easy way to pick up bonus points. But these prizes pack a punch: As they cross along your path of dots, they turn them into Large Dots. While worth 50 instead of 10 points, the Large Dots cut your movement rate in half. Of course, the monsters are not affected. And to make things worse, if one of the prizes hits an energizer (power pill), BLAM! The power pill explodes, and there's no way to get it back.

So if you think you've seen it all in the Pac-Man world, seek this one out. It's much heavier on strategy than its predecessors, but you'll find the ghosts are slightly stupider to compensate. It's not too difficult on the first few boards to bait them into a corner of the maze and then make all four of them follow at once, effectively reducing the number of pursuers to one. At later levels, this becomes increasingly difficult, but also increasingly necessary. For example, board seven has its energizers placed in the middle of a spiral with one entrance and one exit. If you have two ghosts on the prowl, they will divide and conquer by trapping you in the middle, and seldom do you have the time to complete the spiral before one of them catches you.

Junior is easily my favorite in the Pac-Man series, and is not to be passed up when found. The MacMAME emulation is excellent, with only some slight sound distortion, but the music is perfect and it plays at just the right speed. My current high score, after about a year and a half, is 87,260, and I've never completed the seventh board. Consider this your challenge, and good luck!

WEIRD

REASONS TO BUY...



Rarity: Relatively Common
Format(s): Sony Playstation
Release Date: 1996

By Shawn "The Shred-Man" Dumas

Now, I don't recommend you actually doing this all that often, but I am personally notorious for buying games for the *stupidest* reasons. There are just certain oddities or whatnot that make one game more ownership-worthy than another. In that spirit, I bring you this column.

Okay, Toshinden 2. First off, I must say I am not all that impressed with 3-D fighters in general (I know, blasphemy!) Pure and simple, there is only one reason I bought this game: Vermillion. Yup, I bought this because of one hidden character. But what a character! Nothing's cooler than watching your opponent flip and twirl and contort in some flashy attempt to hurt you only to be stopped dead as you casually blast them with a shotgun! It's very anti-climactic for them, I'm sure.

Another weird reason to own this: The camera tricks. It's really bizarre playing upside down in Gaia's stage with no floor. Talk about disorienting. Then there's always the zoom-in feature for all those weirdos out there who just can't get enough of Sofia.

It's always fun to turn the arena upside down on some unsuspecting schmuck who doesn't know of this trick. And if that's not a reason to own this game, this column just isn't for you.

If it is, though, then feel free to join me again as I present more irregular reasons to buy games.

First 32-bit Mega Man is a must-see title

System: Sony Playstation
Publisher: Capcom
Genre: Action / Side Scrolling
Review By: Shawn "The Shred-Man" Dumas

The Game:

My first impression: It has anime? This game *rules!*

Ok, so the voice acting is horrible, but you get to make fun of it.

But Mega Man has always been an incredible series, and now that it's 32-bit, it's even more amazing.

Ok, I'll be honest. The gameplay itself is not a giant leap beyond previous Mega Man games. Most of the 32-bit muscle goes into the anime cut scenes and often silly voices. But that's not to say the gameplay is bad!

Graphics? Come on, this *is* Capcom here. When has a Mega Man game delivered less-than-stellar graphics?

The music is good, but may not be anything I'd tape and listen to. (After trudging through Astro Man's stage, you won't be able to get that music out of your head for days!)

The game itself has a lot of the standard Mega Man features, but there are also plenty of new levels that will keep the fans cursing a bit.

The new save feature does have its disadvantages, however. While it does save you the trouble of writing down long passwords that often get lost, it also limits the places you can start from in the game.

There are certain places where the enemies tend to pile up making things a bit confusing – like one point in the Tengu Man stage where air whales fly by, dumping a legion of Mets. Sometimes you can't see that something's about to hit you until it's too late.

Overall, I think the biggest problem with the game is that there may be certain levels (like the entire Astro Man stage) that players may find too annoying to go through more than once, which cuts down on the replay value. And like every Mega Man game, the average player will finish it in two days.

But c'mon. We're talking Mega Man here. This one you must check out, even if you've never played Mega Man before.

The 'Bots

Everybody knows that a Mega Man game is only as good as the 'Bots that star in it. This section contains spoilers, so stop now if you don't want us to give away any



secrets.

Tengu Man: Contender for the coolest 'Bot ever, Tengu Man is one arrogant punk who packs a mean punch. However, once you learn to avoid his attacks, he's just full of hot air. Use Ice Wave or charged-up Mega Buster on him and you'll soon acquire the Tornado Hold, which is useful not only as a weapon, but also to reach areas beyond your normal jumping range.

Frost Man: He's big and dumb and looks like a cross between an ape and an igloo. If you have the Flash Bomb, you'll most likely beat him with no trouble – if you can get past his stage! Acquire the Ice Wave which can freeze certain fires.

Clown Man: Now, I know what you're thinking, and believe me, I thought it too. But Clown Man is one of the cooler 'Bots in the game. You'll have fun with this one. Use the Tornado Hold on him and he'll get tangled in his own arms and cry for Mommy. The Thunder Claw you acquire come in hand in many places, including grappling onto posts and swinging.

Grenade Man: The most basic 'Bot of this group is probably the easiest and should be your first target. His weak point is the Thunder Claw, but you can take him out with Mega Buster

shots.

Astro Man: This guy is such a wuss he had to go and hide himself in one of the most annoying stages since the Doc Robots of Mega Man 3. Charge your Homing Sniper and try to get close so you hit him and not the orbiting.. things. Defeat him to get the Astro Crush – now this is a weapon!!

Sword Man: Definitely a cool 'Bot. Very un-Wily like, he is noble and sportsman-like. Use the Mega Buster or Water Balloon to gain the Flame Sword. Nice shot.

Search Man: Um... well, at least he's not Aqua Man. A good idea for a 'bot but kind of poorly executed. Hearing "Homing Sniper" in stereo is kind of cool, but when you get it, you have no vocalization. It's the only Mega Power that can be charged, however. Use your Flame Sword to win.

Aqua Man: Oh dear. He looks like a dork. He sounds... like a dork. Astro Crush him and get... a dorky weapon, the Water Balloon!!

Do you need 3 Buster Bros?

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destroying a certain number of bubbles.

The main problem with this collection is that the three games aren't all that different, and no single one of them is worth the price of admission. Buster Bros., the original, is pretty much like the above description, with a modicum of special abilities and time-stopping bubbles. Super Buster Bros. adds the Panic Mode and vastly improved graphics and sound, and little else. Buster Buddies gives you the ability to choose one of four characters, each of whom begins with a special weapon or ability, and features 3D rendered, SGI-style graphics. While the weapons have undergone a bit of tweaking from game to game, there's not really anything new in the power-up department from game to game.

The catch, of course, is this game is really addictive. This is a game that if you like it, you will want to own in a heartbeat. But if it doesn't grab your attention in the first ten minutes, chances are it never will. Two player simultaneous action adds to the fun factor, but won't salvage it for the unenthused.

The bottom line? If you've played the Buster Bros. series in the arcades and miss having it around, by all means pick it up. The games are arcade-perfect and are still enjoyable to play. If you're new to the Buster Bros. world, don't jump in until you've played the game and are sure the investment is worth it.

Mega Man makes the jump to Saturn

Blue Bomber latest victim of Sony's war with Capcom over 2-D games

The rise of the 32-bit systems has ushered in a new era of 3-D gaming. The success of early hits such as *Battle Arena Toshinden* and *ESPN Extreme Games* has certainly proven the viability of 3-D games. But does this signal the end of 2-D gaming as we know it?

Sony seems to think so. There have been numerous disputes between Sony and Capcom on this very subject. Capcom, a leading maker of 2-D games such as the phenomenal *Street Fighter* and *Mega Man* series, has reportedly had serious difficulties convincing Sony to license such 2-D titles as *Darkstalkers*, *Puzzle Fighter*, and *Mega Man 8*.

While all three of these games did eventually arrive on the U.S. market, serious delays preceded all three and no doubt killed a

considerable amount of interest. In the case of *Darkstalkers*, its sequel, *Night Warriors*, had already been available for months on the Sega Saturn by the time it was released. As a result, unsold copies of *Darkstalkers* are still collecting dust on store shelves. This adds fuel to the mistaken belief that 2-D games don't sell, and Sony of America has already admitted that they will not license *Mega Man X4* for the Playstation in this country.

Why does Sony insist that 2-D games are passé? The huge successes of *Street Fighter Alpha* and *Street Fighter Alpha 2* clearly show that when a quality 2-D game is released on schedule, it will sell. The most popular theory is that Sony, knowing that the Saturn has better 2-D capabilities, does-

n't want to play against the strengths of a competing system. And the superior versions of *Night Warriors* and *Alpha 2* seem to support this hypothesis.

But that's not to say that the PSX versions are bad. *Darkstalkers* and *Alpha 2* are both excellent conversions, featuring crisper graphics and clearer sound and voices, but the Saturn versions feature more options, and, some say, superior control.

However, Sony cannot afford to make Capcom upset. They've been making quality titles for years, from the old days of the NES (remember *Bionic Commando* and *Strider*?) right up to their eerie, 3-D military mystery, *Resident Evil*, the top selling Playstation game ever. Sony does not want to see *Resident Evil 2* end up being a Saturn exclusive too. And if Sony does break its ties with Capcom, future hits such as *Street Fighter 3* and *Jedah's Damnation* could send gamers flocking to stores

to pick up their brand new Sega Saturn. I must admit to getting a Saturn almost exclusively for *Night Warriors*.

Additionally, other 2-D games such as *Mortal Kombat Trilogy* have had no trouble coming to market. Even the Neo-Geo titles *Samurai Showdown 3* and *King of Fighters '95* made it to the PSX under Sony's publishing label. It makes you wonder if either side is telling us the whole story in this debate.

Regardless, Capcom keeps reminding us that 2-D games are still fun. And games such as *Criticom* and *Defcon 5* have proven that just because a game is 3-D doesn't mean it's any good. So, Sony, we say to you: Get off your high horse and let Capcom do as they please. By restricting the number of titles available from one of the world's premiere video game manufacturers on the PSX, both Sony and gaming fans have everything to lose and nothing to gain.

☺ THE TOP 5 GAMES WE'RE EMBARRASSED TO OWN ☹

You've done it, I've done it, we've all done it — shelled out perfectly good cash for a less than perfect game. Here are the top 5 that we blew it on...

1. **MORTAL KOMBAT TRILOGY.** We all know that after it's all said and done, MK3 is a *lousy* game. How do you make it worse? Add cheap bosses, cheap new characters, and screw up the old ones from MK1 and MK2. *Trilogy's* a bad game, but we love it anyways.

2. **KILLER INSTINCT.** No throws, 99 hit combos, ridiculous finishing moves and a silly announcer. But hey, it was \$8 at a tag sale, and ya gotta love that theme music.

3. **MARIO PAINT.** No, it's not really a game. No, it's not really any fun. But you can use it to make neat little title screens for your pirated video tapes.

4. **TOP GUN.** Why do we have this game? It was old. It was cheap. It was there. And we probably should have left it there.

5. **STRAWBERRY SHORTCAKE.** Well, it's a 2600 game, and I didn't have it. Lousy excuse, huh? By the way, does anybody know how to *play* it?

Next Issue

Next issue we're planning on celebrating the tenth anniversary of the *Mega Man* series with in depth reviews and strategy of all eight games in the original *Mega Man* series.

CONTEST!

Plus, send in your top five "Man" 'Bots from the original series (*Gemini Man*, *Bomb Man*, *Burst Man*, etc.) and we'll enter you in a free drawing for a poster of the winning 'Bot!

E-MAIL US!